A RETREAT FR
THE LIBERAL PARTY A

The 'realignment of the left' in British politics was one of the defining features of Jo Grimond's leadership of the Liberal Party and has been an important factor in Liberal politics ever since that time. The Liberal Party of the 1940s and 1950s, by contrast, is generally regarded as leaning towards the right, defined by its relationship with the Conservatives and the rump National Liberal Party.[1] Little attention has been paid to relations between the Liberals and Labour during this period. **Robert Ingham** exanines the record.

The Liberal Party began the 1945 parliament broadly supporting the Labour government but gradually became more critical, particularly after Frank Byers replaced Thomas Horabin as Chief Whip in 1946. A number of former Liberal MPs defected to Labour during the late 1940s and early 1950s and high-level talks took place between the parties in 1950 aimed at preventing the Conservatives from returning to power. These moves were unsuccessful, which was probably just as well from the point of view of preserving the independence of the Liberal Party, but showed that there was considerable interest in re-establishing a progressive coalition in UK politics well before Grimond reinvented the Liberal Party after 1956. The extent to which the Liberal Party was split down the middle in its approach to

OM THE LEFT?
ND LABOUR 1945–55

its major rivals at this time is also now starkly apparent. Some senior Liberals were talking to Labour about keeping the Conservatives out of power at the same time as others were discussing the possibility of electoral arrangements with the Conservatives aimed at defeating Labour: Clement Davies may well have been party to both sets of conservations.

The results of the 1945 general election showed a marked shift to the left in British politics, with the Labour Party sweeping to power. The number of Labour MPs increased from 166 at dissolution to 393, with the Conservative total falling from 398 to 213, their lowest number since 1906. The Liberals had hoped to benefit from this swing, not least because their ranks included Sir William Beveridge, author of the eponymous report which was to become the keystone of the welfare state and who had been elected Liberal MP for Berwick in 1944. In fact, the election marked a new low in the long-term decline of the Liberal Party and a mere twelve Liberals were returned to parliament. Beveridge was one of the casualties; and one of the Liberals returned at the poll, Gwilym Lloyd George, was only a nominal supporter of the party and was later to side unambiguously with the Conservatives. The best that could be said about the election result was that the Liberals had not been wiped off the map.

The immediate problem for the Liberals after the election was to select a new leader, as Sir Archibald Sinclair had been defeated in Caithness and Sutherland. Sinclair's National opponent, Eric Gandar Dower, had rashly promised to resign his seat when Japan was defeated, and Liberals expected Sinclair to win the ensuring by-election. In the event, Gandar Dower changed his mind and served for the full Parliament. Faced with this situation, Liberal MPs selected Clement Davies as their chairman for the parliamentary session after a process in which all of the MPs were asked in turn if they would consider taking the job. Thomas Horabin became Chief Whip.

Davies was a controversial choice. Elected for Montgomeryshire in 1929 he followed Sir John Simon into the Liberal Nationals, before becoming an independent in 1939. He rejoined the Liberals in 1942 and was associated with the left-wing Radical Action group.[2] Horabin was also associated with Radical Action and the views expressed in his 1944 monograph *Politics Made Plain* put him well to the left of Sinclair and other Liberal grandees. Only a year before Davies and Horabin had emerged as leaders of the Liberal MPs, Lady Violet Bonham Carter had described them as examples of the 'lunatics and pathological cases' prominent in the party because of its weak position.[3]

Left: Clement Davies, Leader of the Liberal Party 1945–56

Liberals in parliament 1945–50

The first decision Davies and Horabin had to take concerned the Liberal attitude to the King's Speech, which outlined the legislative programme of the new government. Then, as now, the debate at the start of the parliamentary session lasted several days and there were usually votes on opposition amendments. Unusually, no amendments were moved in 1945. Clement Davies devoted much of his speech to international affairs – war was still raging in the Far East – and his remarks about the new government's domestic agenda were positive:

> I am sure that we can all rejoice at the end of the Tory régime, at the end of reaction and chaos. We are looking forward not only in this country but in all countries of Europe, where democracy is rising with new hope, to this progressive Government We wish this Government well, but we want them to take that road firmly. We want them to show plenty of backbone, determination and courage. [An Hon. Member: 'Do not worry.'] I am not worrying; I am just expressing the hope. Why should I not give them this reminder? If they fail, if there is a breach of faith, they will not only do permanent damage to their own party, but to the cause

> of democracy throughout the world. They may do more damage even than 20 dictators. I am perfectly sure that they will go on with this great programme; all I hope is that prosperity will follow upon their work.[4]

Liberal support for government measures was expressed on several occasions during the 1945–46 session, mostly by Davies himself who seems to have received little support from his colleagues in flying the party flag in the Commons. His support for the nationalisation of the Bank of England was criticised by the Conservatives as a 'blank sheet' policy.[5] Later in 1945, Davies supported the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Bill but admonished the government for being insufficiently radical.[6] Criticism of socialist timidity was also expressed by Roderic Bowen in his maiden speech. Bowen, widely regarded as a right-winger,[7] began his speech on the Trunk Roads Bill with the words 'I shall venture to criticise a socialist Minister on the score that his scheme of nationalisation is of far too limited a character'.[8]

The approach taken by Davies and Horabin was based on the notion that the Labour and Liberal Parties were united by a common purpose and differed only in terms of zeal and commitment: this view was reflected in a conference organised by Radical Action at Brackley in April 1946, which Davies and Horabin attended. Could radical Liberals be critical of the fact that Labour was implementing what one participant, Everett Jones, considered to be a largely Liberal programme? The answer was an overwhelming no. Horabin, who had recently resigned as Chief Whip, declared that Labour were doing a first-class job and it was the Liberals' duty to back the government. Davies said that all Labour lacked was a progressive plan of action and a 'war cabinet' style organisation which would improve their policy delivery.[9]

Horabin's biographers, Jaime Reynolds and Ian Hunter, have attributed Horabin's resignation to disenchantment with 'what he perceived as the party's rightward drift under Clement Davies' leadership'.[10] Evidence of a shift away from undiluted enthusiasm for Labour's programme can be found in the autumn and winter of 1945. Speaking on the second reading of the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Bill, Davies agreed with Labour's aim of putting an end to the casual labour system for engaging dock workers but expressed concern at the impact on the liberties of individual workers.[11] Three weeks later, and somewhat surprisingly given his remarks in August, Davies participated in a Conservative motion of censure on government policy, moving a Liberal amendment which attacked Labour for sacrificing civil liberties.[12] It is notable that Davies's concerns were 'right-wing' in terms of the language of the times but were entirely consistent with the Liberal Party's traditional approach to individual rights.

When Horabin resigned as Liberal Chief Whip he claimed that this was because he wanted to contribute more often to debate in the House.[13] He made only one speech – on foreign affairs in June 1946 – before he resigned the Liberal Whip in October 1946. On this occasion he was more candid about the reasons for his departure, complaining that the Liberals had moved to the right and that the government deserved the support of radicals.[14] Davies appointed Frank Byers, the new MP for Dorset North, to replace Horabin as Chief Whip. Described by Roy Douglas as 'one of the small group of visionary and indefatigable individuals determined to infuse vigour and determination as well as a sense of organisation into the party',[15] he quickly became one of the most dominant figures in the party. In October 1947 he was asking Lady Violet Bonham Carter whether Clement Davies should be confirmed as official leader of the party, 'on the ground that he [Frank] cld control him better'.[16]

Left-wing Liberals were later in no doubt that Byers had moved the party to the right, well away from the role set out by Davies in 1945 of providing backbone to a Labour government which might prove too timid. Lancelot Spicer, a former Liberal candidate and chairman of Radical Action, produced a discussion paper for the remaining members of Radical Action in 1948 which described Byers as 'irritating' and 'inadequate' and implied that he was responsible for the party's ditching its radical stance.[17] It seems clear, however, that Byers was reinforcing a trend which had begun earlier and which reflected Davies's own view that Labour had insufficient regard for civil liberties.

The King opened the 1946–47 session of parliament on 12 November 1946 and Clement Davies made his speech in response the next day. General support for Labour's programme was combined with a note of caution, absent a year earlier:

> With regard to the legislative proposals, I repeat what I said at the beginning of this Parliament … we as Liberals will support every progressive measure which is really for the benefit of the community as a whole … But that is on one condition, that whereas we want these radical economic reforms as much as any hon. Member sitting on that side of the House, we will not part with a single one of our spiritual liberties, which are far and away more important than any economic reform.[18]

Left-wing Liberals were later in no doubt that Byers had moved the party to the right, well away from the role set out by Davies in 1945 of providing backbone to a Labour government which might prove too timid.

The Liberals also brought forward an amendment for debate, attacking the trade union closed shop. This direct assault on the heart of the Labour movement was devised by Frank Byers, who opened the debate.

The Liberals' opposition to the 1946 Transport Bill, in which it was proposed to nationalise all inland public transport save for air travel, caused difficulties for the party. G. R. Strauss, the minister in charge of the bill, quoted a wartime Liberal Party pamphlet which advocated nationalisation of the railways, long-distance road haulage and the passenger transport industry. 'Well, our bill fully endorses those general principles,' teased Strauss.[19] Davies had already spoken to oppose the creation of a 'vast all-embracing monopoly' and to say that his party would go no further than

the nationalisation of the railways and the canal network.[20] 'Is this an indication of the retreat of the Liberal Party from the policy on which it fought the last general election?' thundered a Radical Action letter to *The Guardian*.[21]

The party's attitude to the government had hardened considerably by the time of the 1947 King's Speech. Davies said the government had 'done more than any other Government of this country in time of peace to limit the freedom of the individual' and accused Labour of 'threatening' the 'spiritual liberty' of the people.[22] He went on to argue that:

> No Government ever started on their career with greater good will than His Majesty's Government. They had the support of all the workers, and the full support of the trade unions. They had the realisation among the people that the tasks confronting them were enormous. I wished them well on behalf of my colleagues in my speech on the Address in reply to the first Gracious Speech from the Throne in this Parliament. We wished them well, not so much for their success, but because we realised that upon them would depend the fate of the country, and the responsibility to bring it through its difficulties back to normal. They had greater powers over finance and materials, together with controls of all kinds, than any Government has ever had; and what has obviously happened, from the words used this week by the Prime Minister, and emphasised by the Minister for Economic Affairs, is that there has been a lack of vision, foresight and realisation of the effect of many of their actions – a real lack of vision as to what might happen as a result of the failure to exercise the control over finance which was in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Obviously, they did not realise the immensity of the problems, still less the danger. Still less did they give that proper guidance which the country was entitled to expect.[23]

As Clement Davies moved to the right, and the influence of Thomas Horabin waned, some on the Liberal left again looked to reach an agreement with Labour.

One final example of the Liberals' swing to the right during this period will suffice. G. R. Strauss led for the government on the bill to nationalise the steel industry in 1948 and again made hay with a statement of Liberal policy from before 1945. On this occasion he cited a pamphlet entitled *A Radical Economic Policy for Progressive Liberalism* which bore Davies's signature and which argued that 'steel, coal, transport and power are examples of industries which it is vital should be owned by the community'.[24] Davies called for an inquiry, arguing that nationalisation was not necessarily best for the industry at that time and claiming that his stance was consistent with his earlier views.[25] He was undermined by his former colleague Horabin, however, making his first speech in parliament since he was injured in an aeroplane crash in January 1947. 'I really cannot understand why my right hon. and learned Friend is not supporting the Second Reading of this Bill' began Horabin:

> Throughout the war years we worked very closely together. He was my leader in those days even before he was Leader of the Liberal Party, and he taught me quite a lot about the economics we should need to adopt when peace came. It was he who, to a very large extent, converted me to the nationalisation of steel, to the nationalisation of land and so on, but unfortunately I could not change my point of view. I fought the General Election on this issue, and so did my right hon. and learned Friend I believe – perhaps not on the nationalisation of steel, but certainly on the question of the nationalisation of the land.[26]

Horabin's peroration fell on deaf ears and the Liberals united to oppose the bill.

Talking to Labour

There had been sporadic contacts between left-wing Liberals and the Labour Party before the 1945 election, but these had come to nothing. In June 1944 various members of Radical Action, including Emrys Roberts, soon to become a Liberal MP, dined with the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, to discuss the possibility of Labour and radical Liberals entering into a 'contract' or 'bargain'.[27] No clear statement was given of what that contract might involve, but it is reasonable to assume that Radical Action hoped to secure a free run against the Tories for some of their candidates. No agreement was reached, with Morrison taking the orthodox Labour line that all progressives ought to join the Labour Party. He was assured that none of those present had any attention of defecting as this would 'not forwards the cause they were promoting.' This approach to Morrison was made behind the back of the Liberal leadership; a suggested second meeting appears not to have taken place.

At the same time, the Labour Party chairman, Harold Laski, approached Honor Balfour, who was then intending to contest Darwen for the second time following her near miss as an independent Liberal in the 1944 by-election. Balfour was offered a choice of eight safe Labour seats if she were to join the Labour Party. Balfour described the offer as 'tempting' but loyalty to her constituency workers, and her rejection of Clause IV of the Labour Party's constitution, kept her in the Liberal fold.[28] Immediately after the election, Laski repeated his offer, 'we want progressive Liberals in the Labour Party … anyone with your gifts would be welcome.'[29]

As Clement Davies moved to the right, and the influence of Thomas Horabin waned, some on the Liberal left again looked to reach an agreement with Labour. Lancelot Spicer wrote to Richard Crossman MP in November 1946 on behalf of the remaining members of Radical Action stating 'as a group trying to work out a positive set of aims, we are anxious to find out how far we can agree with existing political groups.'[30] The 'dogmatic and doctrinaire' discipline of the Labour whips was given as one reason why Radical Action could not yet endorse the Labour Party, but the initial post-war contact had been made.

A serious approach to Labour was delayed until 1948. Spicer

floated the idea of a radical/Labour coalition operating in seats where the Liberal vote remained strong.[31] The election of a strong radical group to the House of Commons, to supplement Lady Megan Lloyd George and both Emrys and Wilfrid Roberts, would save Labour from the electoral defeat Spicer predicted at the forthcoming general election.

In the same year, A. P. Marshall, a prominent member of Radical Action, sent two memoranda to Morgan Phillips, the Secretary of the Labour Party, written in the name of 'a number of Liberals who have for some years been members of the Radical wing of the Liberal forces' and who were struggling to adapt to 'a desperately difficult situation.'[32] Marshall argued that the Liberal Party was suffering from an 'advanced state of political Parkinson's disease' and would need to die in order for a vibrant radical party to be born. Marshall set out a number of conditions which a government had to satisfy in order to win the support of radicals. The crucial condition was that the government had to enjoy the overwhelming support of the working class. Marshall argued that this ruled out radical support for a Conservative government, as well as any cooperation with the Tories on the basis of the 'Design for Freedom' plan drawn up by an unofficial group of Liberals and Conservatives. That left the Labour Party as the only viable home for radicals. 'All of us in private conversations have found a great measure of agreement with many Labour men and women on immediate and short-run problems. We often find them kindred spirits seeing similar ends in human life. We like their deep and genuine human impulses.'

The first memorandum, written in February 1948, listed five reasons why radical Liberals would not join the Labour Party. These were that they:

- did not accept clause IV of the Labour Party constitution;
- did not accept Labour's rigid disciplinary system;
- did not like the close association between Labour and the trades unions;
- were unimpressed with the standard of officials in the constituency Labour parties; and
- did not accept Labour's stance on private enterprise.

However, in the redrafted second memorandum, written in May 1948, the last reason was omitted. Marshall wrote to Phillips to say that, 'we found our talk with you extremely helpful in clarifying certain points.'[33] The second memorandum may have appealed to the right wing of the Labour Party, in that it called for 'radical reforms to achieve Social Democracy.' Marshall continued to offer an electoral deal to the Labour Party, claiming that a radical/Labour coalition would command the support of at least two-thirds of the Liberal Party and would drive away the Communist Party as well as ensure victory at the next general election. The offer was ignored. Phillips would settle for nothing less than the defection of Radical Action members into the Labour Party. This left Radical Action 'standing very much alone' and Spicer suggested that the group admit failure and disband its political activities.[34] This is what happened after the 1948 memoranda. Spicer refused to stand for the Liberal Party in the 1950 general election, despite being offered the candidacy in Loughborough.

But that was by no means the end of contact between Labour and individual radical Liberals. The results of the 1950 general election left Labour in need of allies, especially as it was widely anticipated that the swing to the right would continue at the next election. Megan Lloyd George, in alliance with Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville, wrote to *The Times* to argue for 'cooperation with Labour on honourable terms to make an effective majority for reform'.[35] Lloyd George engaged in a running battle with the right wing of the Liberal Party during the 1950–52 period, accusing them of undertaking a 'drift away from the old Radical tradition'.[36] In 1950 she, Spicer and Emrys Roberts met with Morrison to discuss the possibility of an arrangement which could prevent the Tories from winning the next election. Morrison commented that although he favoured such a deal, he did not think he could carry the parliamentary Labour Party with him.[37]

Megan Lloyd George, in alliance with Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville, wrote to *The Times* to argue for 'cooperation with Labour on honourable terms to make an effective majority for reform'.

In March 1951 a notice was circulated by 'The Pilgrim' addressed to 'all intelligent Labour MPs'.[38] The Pilgrim argued that a Lib–Lab deal, in which both parties withdrew from certain seats, would gain Labour seventy seats and the Liberals thirty. 'Get down now to the job of working out an electoral arrangement with the Liberals,' the Pilgrim urged. Whereas such a notice could normally be dismissed as a historical curiosity, at the same time Tom Reid, the Labour MP for Swindon, wrote to Morgan Phillips to reveal that Lib–Lab negotiations had been ongoing during the Parliament. Reid's letter deserves quoting in full:

> For months here individual MPs – Labour and Liberal – have been talking of uniting ... A few weeks ago a Liberal MP approached me about it … I then saw Herbert [Morrison] and asked him if I should butt in. He was dubious about the feasibility of the plan; he had made approaches himself. But he told me to go ahead as an individual representing myself only. I did so and saw Megan [Lloyd George]. We covered the whole subject. I found that here had been all sorts of suggestions but no comprehensive understanding covering all the big issues. Then I had several talks with 5 of the Liberal MPs. My first object was to prevent them bringing down the government. In this they have been co-operative … We hammered out a policy for the period till the next election, not one item, I think, contrary to Labour policy. I handed it to Herbert suggesting that he should sound the Executive. The difficulties of getting joint action at elections, constituencies etc was fully realised. Meantime, the Liberals sounded some of their leading people outside Parliament and added a few things to their policy outlined. I showed the note to Herbert … I told him I would give it to Chuter Ede who, I knew, saw possibilities in the plan. That was last night. I asked Chuter to show it to the

> Prime Minister, and then pass it on to some leading members of the Executive. Meantime I had seen Alice Bacon and discussed the whole thing … If deemed promising the executives of the two parties must discuss the policies suggested and if agreed, their implementation if deemed feasible.[39]

In 1951 more than half of the parliamentary Liberal Party, and several prominent Liberals outside of parliament, agreed to a policy statement which was designed to ensure that the Labour government stayed in power for as long as possible. Furthermore, the possibility of a more far-reaching deal, encapsulating electoral arrangements and future government policy was mooted. This agreement was known to Attlee and to senior members of the Labour administration as well as to many senior Liberals. What happened to the agreement? It is likely that both party executives looked unfavourably on the deal: the Liberals' because of the number of executive members who leaned towards the Tories not Labour, and Labour's because the Liberals were not trusted to stick to any deal. Phillips regarded Clement Davies as 'extremely ineffective' and it is likely that he felt that Davies had no power or ability to carry his party, assuming he backed the arrangement.[40]

Who were the five Liberal MPs, with whom Reid discussed the deal? Megan Lloyd George, Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville, all former Radical Action members, would certainly have been approached. Archibald Macdonald, later to help form the Radical Reform Group, may also have been involved. The identity of the fifth, assuming that Reid is not mistaken, is something of a mystery. Rhys Hopkin Morris and Roderic Bowen would, by inclination, have had nothing to do with the Labour Party. Donald Wade was elected only as a result of an arrangement with his local Conservative association and would be unlikely to have assented to a deal with Labour. That leaves Clement Davies and Jo Grimond. Grimond, as Chief Whip, would almost certainly have been involved in any high-level discussion. However, his desk diaries from the period reveal nothing and he never mentioned any such discussions in his memoirs. Evidence of Davies's involvement comes from Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, who recorded Davies commenting in March 1951 that 'somehow the two progressive parties *must* get together to save the world.'[41] Was this a signal of practical political intent, a pipedream, or a mistake by Noel-Baker? Whatever the answer, it is clear that some of the Liberal Party's most senior figures were involved in detailed negotiations with a Labour MP, with a view to establishing a far-reaching agreement with the Labour Party both in Parliament and in the constituencies.

It is commonly stated that Clement Davies saved the Liberal Party by rejecting Churchill's offer of the Ministry of Education. It appears that another decision in 1951, of both the Labour and Liberal Party executives to dismiss a negotiated parliamentary deal between the parties, also helped sustain the Liberal Party's survival as an independent organisation.

It is commonly stated that Clement Davies saved the Liberal Party by rejecting Churchill's offer of the Ministry of Education. It appears that another decision in 1951, of both the Labour and Liberal Party executives to dismiss a negotiated parliamentary deal between the parties, also helped sustain the Liberal Party's survival as an independent organisation.

Again, this was not the end of the issue. Megan Lloyd George lost her seat, Anglesey, in 1951 and there was widespread speculation that she would defect to the Labour Party. In February 1952, her lover, Philip Noel-Baker wrote, 'Archie [Sinclair] has been seeing Hugh Gaitskell and is still asking for *pacts*; Herbert [Morrison] is still stalling as hard as ever. I think they may try to get you to take Anglesey for *us* [i.e. Labour] … I think you ought to see Clem [Davies] at once and say so right away.'[42] Noel-Baker is not the most reliable source of information on this matter. Sinclair was by this time ill and in the House of Lords. Only the year before, Churchill had offered him a place in the cabinet.[43] However, the suggestion that Lloyd George should return to parliament as a Welsh Labour MP had been made. Her Liberal colleagues, who had supported her 'radical group' in Parliament, had other ideas. Honor Balfour, Dingle Foot and, to a lesser extent, Philip Fothergill were still excited by the possibility of a mass radical defection to Labour. During the 1945–55 period a number of Liberal MPs and former MPs drifted into the Labour Party in an uncoordinated fashion. Balfour felt that a well-organised, high-profile defection of several prominent radicals might achieve the sort of realignment of British politics which Jo Grimond was to advocate several years later. Vital to this plan was Lloyd George, who was the most prominent member of this radical group. If she could lead a mass defection, then the balance of power within the Labour Party might tilt to the right, and a radical social democratic Labour Party could emerge, attracting widespread support from across the political spectrum. However, no coordinated activity took place. Lloyd George announced her defection in 1955 independently. Foot followed her shortly afterwards. No mass defection took place. The moment was lost.[44]

Conclusion

The Liberal Party's relationship with Labour after 1945 was more complex than has previously been suggested. The unlikely leadership pairing of Clement Davies and Thomas Horabin began the 1945 parliament as critical friends of the Labour government, worrying not that it would prove too left-wing but that it would be too cautious. By the winter of 1945, however, Davies was beginning to have his doubts about the impact of Labour's economic prescriptions on what would now be called human rights and the Liberals' drift to the right began.

With hindsight, the Liberals' strategy was naïve and doomed to failure. Had the party continued to argue that Labour needed to be more radical it would have found itself allied in the Commons to a ragbag of Communists and independent left-wingers who openly rejected liberalism. The initial course set by Davies and Horabin would have left the mainstream Liberal Party far behind. In dropping Horabin, Davies helped unite the party – no easy task given that it contained such disparate elements as Megan Lloyd George and Rhys Hopkin Morris. It proved impossible, however, for Davies

to argue convincingly that Liberal policy on economic matters had been consistent throughout the decade and that his own views were soundly based. As the 1940s progressed, Labour was increasingly able to portray Davies and his supporters as ideological right-wingers who had disowned the radical liberalism of the past.

The failure of a group of left-wing Liberals to break from the party en masse to join Labour was principally due to the Labour Party's refusal to compromise on fundamental issues such as Clause IV of its constitution. An organised defection would undoubtedly have weakened the Liberal Party further but probably would not have proved fatal. An electoral arrangement with Labour was seriously considered after 1950 and again seems to have foundered because Labour had no wish to compromise. It is a striking measure of the Liberal Party's weakness at this time that it was in negotiations with both major parties that could have put an end to the party's independence. The 1950–51 period was thus a crucial turning point in the history of the party: despite the Liberals' popular support reaching an all-time low, the party leadership turned its back on national electoral arrangements with the other parties and pledged to soldier on alone.

This period also showed how important it was for the Liberal leadership to decide on the attitude the party should take to both of its major rivals, each of which had a strong incentive to emphasise their liberal credentials and attract Liberal voters. Liberal grandees often argued that the party needed to make a clear statement of its policy in order to regain its strength. But the party never wanted for policies: what the electorate needed was a clear explanation of where the Liberals stood on the political spectrum (however much Liberals disliked the concept) and why the party remained relevant. This was to come later in the 1950s, when Jo Grimond positioned the Liberals firmly on the left of British politics and appealed for support from progressives in all parties alienated by the extremists in both. This was where most Liberals thought they stood in 1945, but only after Labour's frailties became evident during the 1950s was it possible to develop a coherent narrative to explain why the Liberal Party still mattered and to use this to campaign for votes.

The party never wanted for policies: what the electorate needed was a clear explanation of where the Liberals stood on the political spectrum (however much Liberals disliked the concept) and why the party remained relevant.

Robert Ingham is Biographies Editor of the Journal of Liberal History *and has written extensively on Liberal history in the* Journal *and elsewhere.*

1 For example see R. Ingham, 'Battle of Ideas of Absence of Leadership', *Journal of Liberal History*, 47, Summer 2005, pp. 36–44.
2 See M. Egan, 'Radical Action and the Liberal Party during the Second World War', *Journal of Liberal History*, 63, Summer 2009, pp. 4–17.
3 M. Pottle (ed.), *Champion Redoubtable: the diaries and letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1914–45* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p. 294 (entry for 15 February 1944).
4 HC Deb, 16 August 1945, cc. 117–18.
5 HC Deb, 29 October 1945, cc. 71–74 for Davies' speech and c. 140 for criticism from Oliver Stanley.
6 HC Deb, 10 October 1945, cc. 296–300.
7 See J. G. Jones, 'Grimond's Rival', *Journal of Liberal History*, 34/35, Spring/Summer 2002, pp. 26–34.
8 HC Deb, 8 November 1945, cc. 1477–80.
9 Balfour Papers, 'Minutes, Radical Action weekend conference at Brackley', 7 April 1946. This collection can be consulted at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
10 J. Reynolds and I. Hunter, 'Liberal Class Warrior', *Journal of Liberal History*, 28, Autumn 2000, p. 20.
11 HC Deb, 12 November 1945, cc. 1795–99.
12 HC Deb, 5 December 1945, cc. 2352–60.
13 Reynolds and Hunter, op. cit., p. 20.
14 Ibid.
15 D. Brack et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (Politicos, 1998), p. 64.
16 M. Pottle (ed.), *Daring to Hope: the diaries and letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1946–69* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 36 (entry for 13 October 1947).
17 Balfour Papers, 'A Radical-Labour Coalition?', April 1948.
18 HC Deb, 13 November 1946, cc. 214–15.
19 HC Deb, 18 December 1945, c. 1990.
20 HC Deb, 16 December 1945, cc. 1655–64.
21 *The Guardian*, 3 December 1946.
22 HC Deb, 24 October 1947, c. 385.
23 HC Deb, 24 October 1947, cc. 387–88.
24 HC Deb, 15 November 1948, cc. 55–56.
25 HC Deb, 16 November 1948, cc. 251–62,
26 HC Deb, 16 November 1948, c. 263.
27 Balfour Papers, 'Notes on dinner with Herbert Morrison', 22 June 1944.
28 Private interview.
29 Balfour Papers, letter H. Laski to Balfour, 4 August 1945.
30 Balfour Papers, letter L. Spicer to R. Crossman, 21 November 1946.
31 Balfour Papers, 'A Radical–Labour Coalition?', April 1948.
32 General Secretary's Papers, Box 4, GS/Lib/4ii–v, Memorandum by Arthur Marshall, February 1948. This was redrafted and can be found at GS/Lib/6 and also as part of Spicer's Papers, 'Memorandum by A. P. Marshall', May 1948. These papers can be consulted at the National Museum of Labour History.
33 General Secretary's Papers, Box 4, GS/Lib/5i–vi, letter A. P. Marshall to Morgan Phillips, 14 May 1948.
34 Balfour Papers, memorandum July 1948. This appears to be the last of Spicer's discussion papers.
35 M. Jones, *A Radical Life: The Biography of Megan Lloyd George, 1902–66* (Hutchinson, 1991), p. 212.
36 Ibid., p. 213.
37 Ibid., p. 214.
38 General Secretary's Papers, Box 4, GS/Lib/18ii.
39 General Secretary's Papers, Box 4, GS/Lib/20i. James Chuter Ede was Labour MP for South Shields and the Leader of the House of Commons. Alice Bacon was Labour MP for Leeds North East and Chairman of the Party.
40 General Secretary's Papers, Box 4, GS/Lib/20, correspondence between M. Phillips and M. Starr, 11 June 1952 and 24 June 1952.
41 Jones, op. cit., p. 215. Philip Noel-Baker was Labour MP for Derby South and was engaged in an affair with Megan Lloyd George throughout this period.
42 Ibid., pp. 236–37.
43 G. de Groot, *Liberal Crusader: the Life of Sir Archibald Sinclair* (Hurst & Co., 1993), p. 235.
44 Private interview.